

## Existing Alternative Pathways- A History & The Future!

I am a seaman having started my seagoing career 23 years ago in 1986. Ever since the humble beginnings as a deckhand being employed on various trawlers in the Northern Prawn Fisheries, I was always interested in the profession as a Marine Pilot. My family owned and operated a tourist vessel and prawn trawlers while I was at school, and my father held his Foreign Going Masters certificate since the age of 23yrs, hence the natural progression towards a seagoing career.

Having served on the fishing vessels for 5 years and working my way up to skipper, fishing international waters, I felt the need to move on and keep upgrading my certificates. Here is the first hurdle I had to negotiate. The time I had spent on the fishing vessels was not appropriate sea time, to obtain a "Trading Certificate", so I was faced with the challenge of getting the approved Trading time, to be eligible to sit the Trading section of the state certificates. I obtained this sea time via various methods including cook/deckhand on tourist vessels and dive master on a local dive boat. After serving on these vessels I was confused in my understanding, why this fishing seatime was considered unsuitable to obtain a trading certificate. I learned more about seamanship and survival at sea whilst fishing, then I could have ever learned on the passenger vessels, but the powers to be considered cooking on a tourist vessel more appropriate time than fishing, to be able to sit the trading certificate..?

At this stage I had completed the master 5 and then master 4 fishing/trading certificates and worked in the tourism industry primarily as Master on dive and reef boats. I realised then after 8 months of running backwards and forwards to the reef, I was literally going nowhere. At this stage I was being paid a minimal wage as Master on a ferry, which at times carried upwards of 270 passengers. The responsibility presented to me, with minimum reward, was a bit overwhelming. So I applied for, and was successful at obtaining a job with a local company as master on a fisheries support vessel, servicing fishing boats on the East Coast and Torres Straits.

During this time BHP advertised for cadets and I was successful at being selected for an interview. This was as far as I got, because I had a Master 4, owned my own house, and was in a defacto relationship. I was told they

couldn't commit to such a candidate, as I was a high risk applicant and would not last long. So instead of being dissuaded, I decided to continue on improving my lot in life.

At this time the Master 3 certificate was not a Diploma in Transport and Distribution and I was able to study for the this certificate externally (whilst at sea) thus avoiding the loss of wages and being able to sit the exams at the local office of the Department of Transport, and eventually after 10 months obtaining the State Master 3 Certificate. Once newly certificated I was promoted within the company who employed me to Master on a small (50m) bulk fuel/container ship, plying the Great Barrier Reef to supply the remote communities of Cape York and the Torres Straits. During this time I attended Sydney Institute of Technology, on numerous occasions, completing the short courses and the STCW endorsement. I applied to the Offshore, for a deck officer's position, after being awarded with the STCW endorsement, but due to the cyclic highs and lows of this industry was unsuccessful. During this time I served as Master with another local company, on their 80 and 90m self discharging general cargo vessels.

It was then announced, to maintain the Master 3 with the STCW endorsement I would have to sit another set of oral exams to satisfy AMSA as it was changing to the new European system and be awarded with the Master <500GT. I submitted my sea time to AMSA and was happy to find out I was eligible to advance my certificate, to the Advanced Diploma of Transport and Distribution Master <3000GT. With the blessing of my wife and two children, I headed to Fremantle in January 2005, and by October of the same year was successful with the orals conducted by AMSA . Marine orders Part 3 required 12 months seetime as Master over 1500GT or watch keeper over 3000GT, to be eligible for the next step up to Master Unrestricted. After serving on a 300m bulk carrier as 3<sup>rd</sup> mate, on the Japan Australia run, and Master of container ships over 1500GT, recorded the required sea time in 18 calendar months. Then I had the choice of another set of orals or to attend the Management of Large Vessels course at Challenger Tafe in Fremantle. The choice was easy, deciding to attend the Tafe at Fremantle completing the Master upgrade. Finally in October 2007, I was awarded the Master unrestricted after 21 years at sea.

Once newly certificated, I finally got a job in the Offshore as extra second mate on an Anchor handler/supply vessel. After three, 5 weeks swings, advanced to Chief Mate and was due to be given command in the very near future when I was very pleased to find out my application for a position as Marine Pilot had been successful. This news made all my efforts (with the support of my family) well worthwhile. Even though I had spent minimal time on large blue water vessels, the ship handling experience, the Pilot Exemption Certificates gained during my time and the training provided, once employed in the new position, was excellent preparation for the position as marine pilot. I have been employed as a Pilot for 17 months and am now the holder of a pilot licence for 4 ports and a training licence for another two ports.

At no time during my advancement through the certificates, was I sponsored by any of my employers for loss of income, having to re-mortgage my home to support my family, while advancing through the certificates, proving if you really want to achieve something in life, a can do attitude must be adopted taking each hurdle as presented. I am not the only one with a similar history, with many other pilots having similar stories of advancement through state certificates.

With the ever changing Marine environment in regard to training and employment opportunities being presented, the potential of attracting Mariners with the move to Pilotage is an ever increasing challenge. With Australia's blue water fleet shrinking and the chance to gain the "traditional" path to pilotage getting harder and harder, it is often overlooked that Australia still has a large pool of professional Officer Trainees, on Coastal Fishing and Offshore vessels. The changes to M.O.3 with the introduction of the Tinnie to Tanker pathway will make the transition from fishing and coastal certificates to AMSA Master easier. Over the years the goal posts of achievement have been continually moved, with all but the very dedicated Officers, having the incentive to remain in the industry and improve their certification.

With the push for Alternative Pathway Training, for future pilots, gaining momentum, I am unsure why the regulators are entertaining this method of training. I know with only 9 months of seetime and thus having very little real life experience, I would not like to be presented with the challenge of being in

charge of the pilotage of a large ship when things don't go to plan. A loaded bulk carrier in a restricted channel with an engine/steering failure, an irate cruise ship captain, under commercial pressure to get his ship into port when it is obvious the conditions don't permit...etc etc. During my short time as Marine Pilot I have already had the main engine fail to fire astern on the approach to the berth, a gangway let go after lifting off the berth, having to stop the ship so it could be brought home and had visibility reduced to zero on approach, all whilst piloting ships over 225m. If the pilot isn't the holder of a Master Unlimited, he will be on a different level to the Master, putting him on the back foot when interacting with these people. I for one am glad the Master Unlimited is the minimum certificate as it gave me incentive to drive for this goal, ensuring the experience gained along the way, was used in making the transition to pilotage.

With many International ships being repeat visitors to Australian ports the Australian Government could step up to the plate, giving incentives to these shipping companies to allow Australian seaman to serve on these ships to gain experience, if the Officer Candidate is not interested in serving in the Offshore or Coastal Ships. Subsidised wharfage and tug fees could also be considered as incentives to these companies, to take on Australian seaman in a training role. I don't know of any program that promotes pilotage at a senior school level, where existing Pilots could visit high schools and speaking one on one with school leavers, and even getting them to join a pilotage, in a work experience capacity, to help promote the profession. These are some of the ideas that could be entertained, to ensure our pool of suitable qualified Master Unrestricted Mariners, doesn't dry up, making sure the quality of Pilot candidates in Australia is maintained.

In conclusion I hope our regulators take a long hard look at the path they are treading with the Alternative Pathway Training, and ensure that the minimum requirement for a pilot applicant is maintained with a Master Unlimited. The journey to Master Unrestricted doesn't have to be as difficult or as long as the one described above, and in actual fact, with the correct path mapped out, can be achieved, in 6-8 years, with no previous seetime. Even after taking my Alternative Pathway and experiencing the highs and lows along the way, Pilotage is without doubt the most enjoyable and rewarding job I have had to

date. If after reading this you have an interest in Pilotage work, don't hesitate to contact your ports pilot manager or AMOU representative for an insight into one of the world's oldest and most rewarding professions.